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03/11/24 BIG TECH

# West Virginia Lawmakers OK Bill Drawing Back One of the Country's Strictest Child Vaccination Laws + More

*The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.*

By **The Defender Staff**

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## West Virginia Lawmakers OK Bill Drawing Back One of the Country's Strictest Child Vaccination Laws

**Associated Press reported**:

> West Virginia's GOP-controlled state Legislature voted Saturday to allow some students who don't attend traditional public schools to be exempt from state vaccination requirements that have long been held up as among the most strict in the country.
>
> The bill was approved despite the objections of Republican Senate Health and Human Resources Chair Mike Maroney, a trained doctor, who called the bill "an embarrassment" and said he believed lawmakers were harming the state.
>
> West Virginia, with some of the lowest life expectancy rates in the U.S. and a quarter of all children living in poverty, is one of only two states, along with California, that don't permit nonmedical exemptions to vaccinations as a condition for school entry.
>
> The new proposed vaccine law in West Virginia, which now heads to the desk of Republican Gov. Jim Justice, allows virtual public school students to be exempt and for private and parochial schools to institute their own policies either exempting students or not.

## Exclusive: U.S. Must Move 'Decisively' to Avert 'Extinction-Level' Threat From AI, Government-Commissioned Report Says

**TIME reported**:

> The U.S. government must move "quickly and decisively" to avert substantial national security risks stemming from artificial intelligence (AI) which could, in the worst case, cause an "extinction-level threat to the human species," says a report commissioned by the U.S. government published on Monday.
>
> The three authors of the report worked on it for more than a year, speaking with more than 200 government employees, experts, and workers at frontier AI companies — like OpenAI, Google DeepMind, Anthropic and Meta — as part of their research. Accounts from some of those conversations paint a disturbing picture, suggesting that many AI safety workers inside cutting-edge labs are concerned about perverse incentives driving decision-making by the executives who control their companies.
>
> The finished document, titled "An Action Plan to Increase the Safety and Security of Advanced AI," recommends a set of sweeping and unprecedented policy actions that, if enacted, would radically disrupt the AI industry. Congress should make it illegal, the report recommends, to train AI models using more than a certain level of computing power.
>
> The report focuses on two separate categories of risk. Describing the first category, which it calls "weaponization risk," the report states: "Such systems could potentially be used to design and even execute catastrophic biological, chemical, or cyber-attacks, or enable unprecedented weaponized applications in swarm robotics."
>
> The second category is what the report calls the "loss of control" risk, or the possibility that advanced AI systems may outmaneuver their creators. There is, the report says, "reason to believe that they may be uncontrollable if they are developed using current techniques, and could behave adversarially to human beings by default."

## Dozens of Top Scientists Sign Effort to Prevent AI Bioweapons

**The New York Times reported**:

> Dario Amodei, chief executive of the high-profile A.I. start-up Anthropic, told Congress last year that new A.I. technology could soon help unskilled but malevolent people create large-scale biological attacks, such as the release of viruses or toxic substances that cause widespread disease and death.
>
> Senators from both parties were alarmed, while A.I. researchers in industry and academia debated how serious the threat might be.
>
> Now, over 90 biologists and other scientists who specialize in A.I. technologies used to design new proteins — the microscopic mechanisms that drive all creations in biology — have signed an agreement that seeks to ensure that their A.I.-aided research will move forward without exposing the world to serious harm.
>
> The agreement does not seek to suppress the development or distribution of A.I. technologies. Instead, the biologists aim to regulate the use of equipment needed to manufacture new genetic material.

## SCOTUS Is Hearing 2 Cases About Political Censorship on Social Media That Could Change How the Internet Works Forever

**Insider reported**:

> The Supreme Court of the United States has had its hands full this session, hearing important arguments about redistricting and gerrymandering in South Carolina, whether domestic-violence-related restrictions on the ownership of firearms are a violation of the Second Amendment, and deciding that former President Donald Trump is eligible to be on the ballot again this year.
>
> But a pair of laws being quietly considered by the highest court in the land could — depending on how SCOTUS rules — change the way the internet works forever, legal experts told Business Insider.
>
> Two legal experts told BI that a victory for the states in these cases would be a massive blow to the First Amendment because the amendment grants the privilege of free speech to companies and individuals and prevents the government from forcing them to speak — or not speak — in a certain way. Should the laws take effect, the government would be allowed to infringe on the social media companies' right to free speech by compelling platforms to host certain content.
>
> "If the states win, then I expect that we are going to very quickly have a very different sort of internet experience," Justin (Gus) Hurwitz, academic director of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for Technology, Innovation & Competition, told BI.
>
> Hurwitz said companies will likely do two things immediately: "The first is they will, at least on a temporary basis, stop hosting content, comments, user-generated speech, discussion forums, and things like that."

## 'New Text, Same Problems': Inside the Fight Over Child Online Safety Laws

**The Guardian reported**:

> Sharp divisions between advocates for children's safety online have emerged as a historic bill has gathered enough votes to pass in the U.S. Senate. Amendments to the bill have appeased some former detractors who now support the legislation; its fiercest critics, however, have become even more entrenched in their demands for changes.
>
> The Kids Online Safety act (Kosa), introduced more than two years ago, reached 60 backers in the Senate in mid-February. A number of human rights groups still vehemently oppose the legislation, underscoring ongoing divisions among experts, lawmakers and advocates over how to keep young people safe online.
>
> Sponsored by the Connecticut Democrat Richard Blumenthal and the Tennessee Republican Marsha Blackburn, Kosa would be the biggest change to American tech legislation in decades. The bill would require platforms like Instagram and TikTok to mitigate online dangers via design changes or opt-outs of algorithm-based recommendations, among other measures. Enforcement would demand much more fundamental modifications to social networks than current regulations require.

## Johns Hopkins Needs to Drop Its COVID Vaccine Mandate

**The Baltimore Sun reported**:

> One of my proudest accomplishments is earning my doctorate in political science from Johns Hopkins University. My oldest son applied to colleges this year, he loves and excels in mathematics, and Hopkins would have been a perfect school for him to consider. But I did not mention the school to him as a possibility, we did not visit Homewood, and he did not apply.
>
> Why did I not encourage my son to apply to Johns Hopkins? The reason is the COVID-19 vaccine mandate. Given that nearly all colleges by now have dropped their mandate, Hopkins is an outlier in mandating a shot that does not prevent infections and has side effects. It is past time for Hopkins to drop its COVID-19 vaccine mandate.
>
> If the vaccines were as harmless as water, then perhaps people would not protest so much. But a recent global study published in the journal Vaccine identified "safety signals for myocarditis, pericarditis, Guillain-Barré syndrome, and cerebral venous sinus thrombosis." As a parent, I want an evidence-based explanation of why getting this shot for my children is safer than not getting it. The Hopkins website does not offer an explanation, nor does it address the situation of students who have had a prior infection.
>
> The Journal of Medical Ethics published an article co-authored by Marty Makary, a professor of surgery at Johns Hopkins. The article provides three reasons that universities should end COVID-19 vaccine mandates for college students: Many young people by now have been infected by COVID-19, the vaccines lack sustained transmission reduction, and the age of peak risk for myocarditis is young adults aged 16-17 years. The authors argue that universities may be keeping mandates because of status quo bias, in other words, because it is hard to change a policy once it is in place, even if it has no rational basis.

## '911' Actor's Lawsuit Over COVID Vaccine Firing Heads to Trial in Major Test for Studios

**The Hollywood Reporter reported**:

> 20th Television must face a religious discrimination trial for firing Rockmond Dunbar, an original castmember on 911, after he refused to take the COVID-19 vaccine, marking the second ruling to clear the way for trial a lawsuit against a studio over terminations triggered by vaccine mandates amid the pandemic.
>
> U.S. District Judge Dolly Gee found on Friday that 20th may have discriminated against Dunbar for declining to provide him a religious exemption to the vaccine as a follower of the Church of Universal Wisdom. The trial will assess whether he had a sincerely held religious belief within the meaning of civil rights laws that conflicted with the vaccine mandate and if reasonable accommodations could have been offered, allowing him to continue acting on the series without endangering others or causing undue hardship to the studio.
>
> If 20th is found to have engaged in religious discrimination in the trial, the decision could threaten how studios approach exemptions to vaccine mandates if they are reimplemented in the future. Dunbar claimed that his request for an exemption was denied after Disney determined that he was not a true believer in the Church of Universal Wisdom.
>
> An exemption request from General Hospital's Ingo Rademacher, who was fired from the series after refusing the vaccine, was similarly rejected after Disney, which owns ABC, questioned the sincerity of his belief in a book called The Revelation of Ramala. It appears that Disney vetted exemption applications on a case-by-case basis, investigating whether the religions constituted true religious institutions and whether applicants actually followed the beliefs.

## Veterans Affairs Kept COVID Vaccine Mandate in Place Without Evidence

**The Epoch Times reported**:

> The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reviewed no data when deciding in 2023 to keep its COVID-19 vaccine mandate in place.
>
> VA Secretary Denis McDonough said on May 1, 2023, that the end of many other federal mandates "will not impact current policies at the Department of Veterans Affairs."
>
> He said the mandate was remaining for VA healthcare personnel "to ensure the safety of veterans and our colleagues."
>
> Mr. McDonough did not cite any studies or other data. A VA spokesperson declined to provide any data that was reviewed when deciding not to rescind the mandate. The Epoch Times submitted a Freedom of Information Act for "all documents outlining which data was relied upon when establishing the mandate when deciding to keep the mandate in place."
>
> The agency searched for such data and did not find any. The VA's mandate remains in place to this day.

## Top Democrat, Republican Intel Senators Blast TikTok: 'The Most Powerful Propaganda Tool Ever'

**The Daily Wire reported**:

> Top Democrat and Republican senators warned over the weekend that TikTok, the social media app allegedly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, is "the most powerful propaganda tool" that officials have ever seen.
>
> The remarks from Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Mark Warner (D-VA) and Ranking Member Marco Rubio (R-FL) on CBS News's "Face the Nation" come as the U.S. House of Representatives is set to vote on a bill this week that would force ByteDance, the Chinese company that owns TikTok, to divest its ownership in the company or it will be banned in the U.S.
>
> Warner slammed President Joe Biden's presidential campaign for joining TikTok, saying it sent "a pretty darn mixed message." Warner warned that TikTok poses a threat to the U.S. by collecting Americans' data and manipulating what they see to turn them against each other.
>
> Rubio said people get so hooked on TikTok because its algorithm has a powerful "recommender engine, which is one of the best in the world."

## As the Change Healthcare Outage Drags On, Fears Grow That Patient Data Could Spill Online

**TechCrunch reported**:

> U.S. healthcare system to a halt for the second week in a row.
>
> Hospitals have been unable to check insurance benefits of in-patient stays, handle the prior authorizations needed for patient procedures and surgeries or process billing that pays for medical services. Pharmacies have struggled to determine how much to charge patients for prescriptions without access to their health insurance records, forcing some to pay for costly medications out of pocket with cash, with others unable to afford the costs.
>
> Since Change Healthcare shut down its network suddenly on February 21 in an effort to contain the digital intruders, some smaller healthcare providers and pharmacies are warning of crashing cash reserves as they struggle to pay their bills and staff without the steady flow of reimbursements from insurance giants.
>
> As the near-term impact of the ongoing outages on patients and providers becomes clearer, questions remain about the security of millions of people's highly sensitive medical information handled by Change Healthcare.

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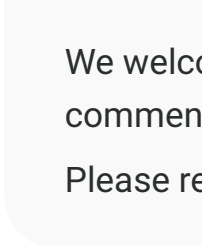

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**Boopjr**
a month ago

We definitely have to be really careful with AI. The government needs to finds ways to regulate its use. Also its unbelievable that any company or school is still mandating the covid clot shot? It's all about the money

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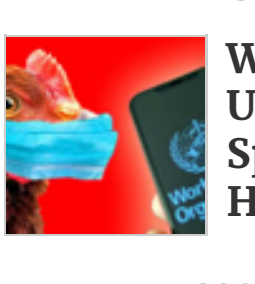
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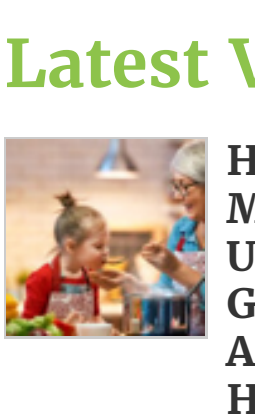
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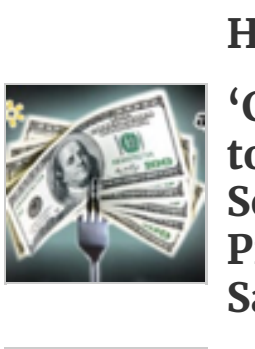
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